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Notes

[Contributions in the form of notes or discussions should be sent to John A. Scott, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.]

A BRITISH HORATIUS

The newspapers have recently reported the case of a British sailor who shot down a German prisoner in cold blood on board the British warship "Resolution." He is said to have sought to justify himself by stating that he had lost two brothers in the war and "was going to have his own back at the Germans." This instance will recall to every student of the first book of Livy the passage in which he describes the contest between the three Roman Horatii and the three Alban Curiatii. After two of the Romans had fallen the surviving brother succeeded in dispatching each of the three Albans in turn. As he confronted the last one, he is said to have exclaimed: "duos fratrum Manibus dedi; tertium causae belli huiusce, ut Romanus Albano imperet, dabo" (c. xviii).

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HOMERIC CRITICISM APPLIED TO PLATO

In the *Phaedo* 63 D, Crito tells Socrates that the attendant who is to administer the hemlock objects strongly to the conversation since this heats the blood of the condemned and prevents the poison from doing its work, making it necessary oftentimes to administer a second, and even a third, dose. Socrates replies that the only attention which Crito needs to pay to the fellow is to tell him to be ready to give two or even three doses. At the close of the dialogue, however, when Socrates asks the same servant if he may pour a libation from the cup of hemlock, the attendant says (117 B) that only enough of the drug is prepared for the proper dose. Clearly Plato (who was absent from the jail on the day of the execution) is using two sources in his account, or—what is much more probable—the whole incident in which Crito appears (63 D–E) is an interpolation. It interrupts the dialogue, which otherwise flows smoothly; if we excise the passage only the slightest alterations in the text are necessary to remove all traces of the episode. Platonists will say of this suggestion, "Absurd!" We agree with them. But substitute Homer for Plato, and a contradiction as slight or even slighter; we shall be following the only "scholarly" method of treating the Homeric poems, and the "interpolation," whether agreed to or not, will at least run a very good chance of being treated seriously by the higher critics.

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